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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR BROWNFIELD'S MARCH 18 MEETING WITH
ASSOCIATION FOR ALTERNATIVE SOCIAL POLICY (MINGA) DIRECTOR

Summary

11. (U) The Ambassador emphasized the important role human rights workers in a democratic society to Gloria Florez, the Executive Director of the Association for Alternative Social Policy (MINGA) in a March 18 meeting. MINGA officials expressed appreciation for the Ambassador's visit to demonstrate USG support for human rights defenders. They expressed concerns over ongoing violence and threats, extrajudicial executions, and a lack of judicial capacity to fight impunity. They said fumigation and land issues negatively impacted displaced communities and other vulnerable groups. The Ambassador offered to continue to work together to formulate concrete solutions to human rights concerns. Florez and the Ambassador held a brief joint press encounter following the meeting. End Summary.

MINGA: Human Rights Defenders

12. (SBU) MINGA Director, Florez, told the Ambassador on March 18 that human rights concerns remain a serious problem in Colombia. She depicted current conditions as a "profound crisis" of systematic attacks and assassinations. MINGA provides legal services, assists victims of human rights violations, and demands that the GOC provide more human rights guarantees. She said MINGA works in partnership with local organizations, affected communities, and the Catholic Church to empower victims. Their work focuses primarily in the areas of Narino, Putumayo, Norte de Santander, Guajira, and Cauca with indigenous communities, Afro-Colombians, women, and other vulnerable groups. MINGA no longer maintains activity in Cesar due to high security concerns. She indicated that border areas with Ecuador and Venezuela -- with large numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) -- remain particularly worrisome. Despite these challenges, she expressed confidence in her group's continuing efforts and thanked the Ambassador for "sending a strong message of USG support" by visiting the MINGA office. Florez thanked the Embassy's efforts on the human rights front and our support of human rights defenders in Colombia who remain stigmatized and threatened.

13. (U) The Ambassador expressed respect for human rights NGO's and their important role in a democratic society. He

emphasized our mutual goals to eliminate violence and promote a just society, providing all citizens with the capacity to live in dignity and peace. He acknowledged that although we may not agree with all of MINGA's analysis and conclusions, we welcome communication channels to discuss problems and offer pragmatic solutions. In a statement to the press following the meeting, the Ambassador underscored the critical role of human rights and civil society groups and the need for security for them to fulfill this role.

14. (SBU) Francisco Bustamante said he and other human rights leaders had received threats this month from a group alleging to be the Aguilas Negras of Bogota (note: many criminal groups loosely use this name to call attention to their activity but have no relation to the group, and several other individuals report recently receiving similar threats). He said the Ambassador's visit amidst the security threats highlights the importance of protecting human rights workers. He said civilians often get caught in the middle of fighting between the military and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in his hometown of Cauca and other regions. He suggested that the Embassy regularly visit other human rights organizations to continue demonstrating our support. The Ambassador agreed to make such visits.

Fumigation Impact and Judicial Reform

15. (SBU) Amaury Padilla said that aerial fumigation directly hurts the Putumayo population, and alternative development projects did not sufficiently address community concerns. Despite heavy military presence, paramilitaries continued threatening civilians in Putumayo. Extrajudicial killings,

arbitrary detentions, and child recruitment by all armed actors were "constant and permanent." He claimed that fumigation caused a humanitarian crisis of displacement and hunger, while local officials did nothing to alleviate the distress. Diana Sanchez added that the 15th mobile brigade in Catatumbo was guilty of extrajudicial killings and that judicial vigilance remains necessary to fight impunity. She said the local prosecutors responded slowly to denouncements, and they lacked the personnel and resources to investigate all cases in a timely manner.

Megaprojects, Land, and Drugs

16. (SBU) Florez said paramilitaries occupied valuable lands and inflated their value in Cucuta and Tibu. Megaprojects took over remaining lands, preventing any possibility of restitution for IDPs. She said private companies must recognize the impact of their businesses on human rights and must engage with local communities. Drug traffickers, criminal bands, and the FARC continue to create a climate of violence -- often through anti personnel mines, child soldier recruitment, and illicit activities that violate the autonomy of indigenous groups and peace communities.

17. (U) The Ambassador said the problem of violence and drugs is a decades-old problem that we all recognize; the way forward remains working together to develop concrete solutions. He suggested that in addition to short-term humanitarian assistance, we need to develop long-term economic and social strategies. The Ambassador offered continuing dialogue with MINGA -- and in consultation with international and local organizations -- to come up with concrete solutions to these problems.

18. (U) In the follow-on press encounter with Florez, the Ambassador summarized his comments to MINGA on the importance of an energetic human rights community in a democratic society. All questions from the media, however, focused on the March 17 OAS ministerial concerning the Colombia-Ecuador-Venezuela dispute.
Brownfield